

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HONG K 14241 080830Z

21

ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00
DODE-00 DOTE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 CIEP-01 FAA-00 PM-04
NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 /063 W
----- 039454

R 080745Z DEC 76

FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2990
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 14241

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: EAIR BM HK CH VN LA TH
SUBJECT: UNION OF BURMA AIRWAYS CONSIDERS HANOI-CANTON-HONG KONG
ROUTE

SUMMARY: UNION OF BURMA AIRWAYS (UBA) IS TRYING TO ESTABLISH A NEW AIR ROUTE RUNNING FROM RANGOON TO BANGKOK, VIENTIANE, HANOI, CANTON AND HONG KONG. THIS WOULD BE THE FIRST AIR ROUTE DIRECTLY CONNECTING HONG KONG WITH A MAINLAND CHINA CITY AND ALSO THE FIRST HONG KONG-HANOI AIR LINK. HOWEVER, OFFICIALS HERE BELIEVE THAT PROSPECTS FOR THE ROUTE TO BE OPERATIONAL IN THE NEAR FUTURE ARE NOT GOOD. END SUMMARY

1. OFFICIAL BRITISH SOURCES INFORMED CONGEN OFF THAT UBA, UNDER THE PRODDING OF PRESIDENT NE WIN, HAS BEEN EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A RANGOON-BANGKOK-VIENTIANE-HANOI-CANTON-HONG KONG ROUTE. THE BURMESE DIRECTOR OF CIVIL AVIATION REPORTEDLY TRAVELED TO THE PRC THIS YEAR AND SECURED CHINESE AGREEMENT ON THE CANTON-HONG KONG LEG. THE BURMESE ALREADY HAVE A LONG STANDING AGREEMENT WITH THE BRITISH ON A RANGOON-
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PAGE 02 HONG K 14241 080830Z

HONG KONG ROUTE VIA THE CHINA MAINLAND AND VIETNAM RECENTLY

AGREED TO UBA OVERFLIGHTS.

2. THE BRITISH POINT OUT THAT THE FOLLOWING MAJOR DIFFICULTIES
MUST BE RESOLVED BEFORE THE ROUTE CAN BE OPERATIONAL:

A. TECHNICAL ARRANGEMENTS MUST BE MADE FOR HANDLING THE
FLIGHTS BETWEEN CANTON AND HONG KONG. THE BRITISH INFORMED
THE BURMESE THAT THEY ARE WILLING TO TALK TO THE CHINESE
ABOUT THESE ARRANGEMENTS ON ANY LEVEL-DIPLOMATIC, CIVIL
AVIATION OR CONTROLLER--BUT IT WAS UP TO THE BURMESE TO
GET THE TALKS SET UP.

B. GIVEN THE CURRENT STATE OF POOR RELATIONS BETWEEN THAILAND
AND VIETNAM SINCE THE OCT. 6 CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT IN BANGKOK,
THE THAIS MIGHT HAVE OBJECTIONS TO BANGKOK BEING ON THE ROUTE.
UBA OFFICIALS REPORTEDLY WOULD BE HAPPY TO SEE THE BANGKOK
STOP DROPPED BUT NE WIN IS INSISTING ON IT.

C. THERE WILL BE DIFFICULTIES FINDING PILOTS FOR THIS ROUTE.
CONSIDERING THE NATURE OF THE ROUTE, IT WOULD BE IMPOLITIC
TO USE EXPATRIATE PILOTS AND ALL THE UBA BURMESE PILOTS ARE
SAID TO BE AT PRESENT IN JAIL ON CHARGES INVOLVING ILLEGAL
POSSESSION OF FOREIGN CURRENCY.

COMMENT: THE UBA CANTON-HONG KONG LINK WOULD PROVE CONVENIENT
FOR THE CHINESE, WHO ARE OBVIOUSLY INTERESTED IN INCREASING THEIR
TIES TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD WHILE ENABLING THEM TO CONTINUE IN
THEIR "PRINCIPLED STAND" OF NO PRC FLIGHTS TO HONG KONG SO LONG
AS TAIWAN HAS ITS AIRLINE HERE. HONG KONG'S CATHAY PACIFIC
DOES NOT FLY TO THE MAINLAND SINCE THEY PREFER THE MORE LUCRATIVE
TAIWAN ROUTE. THE VIETNAMESE, WHO ARE CLEARLY EAGER TO IMPROVE
TRADE RELATIONS WITH THE WEST, MUST CERTAINLY WELCOME THE PROS-
PECTS OF A DIRECT LINK WITH A MAJOR AIR CENTER SUCH AS HONG KONG,
SINCE VIETNAM-BOUND WESTERN BUSINESSMEN AND VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS
ARE MOSTLY LIMITED TO THE CUMBERSOME CHOICES OF TRAVELING TO
VIENTIANE OR TO NANNING (PRC). OFFICIALS IN HONG KONG NOTE THAT
IF THE BURMESE FOLLOW THEIR USUAL PACE AT GETTING THINGS DONE,
EVEN WITH UNIVERSAL AGREEMENT, IT WILL BE A LONG TIME BEFORE
UBA EVER GETS AN AIRCRAFT TO MAKE THIS RUN.

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PAGE 03 HONG K 14241 080830Z

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AIR ROUTES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976HONGK14241
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X2
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760453-0360
From: HONG KONG
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761263/aaaacceh.tel
Line Count: 107
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EB
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 APR 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <16 AUG 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: UNION OF BURMA AIRWAYS CONSIDERS HANOI-CANTON-HONG KONG ROUTE SUMMARY: UNION OF BURMA AIRWAYS (UBA) IS TRYING TO
TAGS: EAIR, BM, HK, CH, VN, LA, TH, UNION OF BURMA AIRWAYS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006